

Friday's Feature**By****Theresa Friday****December 25, 2006****Rosemary is for remembrance**

Rosemary is typically considered a culinary herb. But there are so many uses for rosemary that no garden should be without this attractive and versatile plant.

The genus name *Rosmarinus* means "dew of the sea", a reference to the plant's preference for seaside conditions. This plant does indeed have good salt tolerance. The species name - *officinalis* - indicates that the plant has been used for medicinal purposes. Rosemary was a vital part of many ancient herb gardens and is still one of the most widely planted herbs.

Rosemary is a member of the mint family and may be grown outside from zones 8 to 11. In its native range around the Mediterranean Sea, rosemary flourishes in coastal regions so arid that a significant part of the plant's moisture comes from the dew absorbed through the foliage. Rosemary has flourished in Southern gardens ever since the arrival of European colonists on these shores.

Rosemary is steeped in holiday traditions, symbolism, and legends. Associated with remembrance, friendship, and fidelity, many stories have been told about this fragrant herb.

Two rosemary legends relate directly to the Christmas story. Rosemary flowers were originally white. One day during her travels, Mary draped her blue cloak over a rosemary bush. The rosemary flowers turned blue and the whole plant took on the lovely color and fragrance of Mary's cloak.

In a similar legend, Mary dries the baby Jesus's clothes on a fragrant bush after laundering. The plant's name, rosemary, and its blue flowers are in remembrance of its humble service to the Holy family.

Because rosemary lends itself to pruning into topiary shapes, it is frequently seen as a potted plant pruned into a traditional cone-shaped Christmas tree. To maintain the shape, trim off branches that grow outside of the desired shape. Use the cuttings for cooking, strewing on walkways to release the aroma, or even adding to the grill or fireplace to release their smell.

After the holidays, consider planting your rosemary in the landscape. Rosemary needs at least six hours of full sun, well-drained soil and good air circulation. It is relatively easy to grow as long as it is watered sparingly to prevent root rot. Fertilize by mulching with a light layer of compost or using fish emulsion or other organic fertilizer.

If you keep your rosemary in a pot, the challenge with caring for this plant is to keep it on the dry side, but not so dry that it dies of drought. Repotting may be needed as they can get rootbound. If placed outside in a pot it can survive most of our normal temperatures.

Rosemary is propagated best from cuttings. Pencil-size cuttings should be taken in fall or early winter. Remove the leaves from the bottom half of the stems, and then stick the cuttings in moist garden soil, where they will root by summer. In moist climates, where rosemaries often prove short-lived, it is a good idea to root new plants periodically to maintain a supply of replacements.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>